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A Review of the inscription Kharavela and its implication on the Ancient Tamil history

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Introduction: Kharvela had been the greatest king of India ruling many parts of Northern and as well as Southern India registering his victory over other territorial areas. Definitely, Kharavela had connection with the Tamil kings during his reign, as he reportedly defeated the "Confederacy of Dravidian kingdoms" that was threatening his territories, existed for many hundreds of years before him. However, at the national level, he has been relegated to the background and not much prominence is given to him. The British / Western scholars have perhaps neglected him for obvious reasons and even the Indian counterparts followed the suit. However, recently excavated evidences from Orissa take its heritage to Pre-Mauryan period. The pre-Mauryan history of India is very important as the historians have not explained the huge gap between Indus Valley Civilization (IVC 2500-1950 BCE) and the Mauryan period (c.300-150 BCE). Thus, Kharavela comes in the context of study.

The Date of Kharavela: Kharavela has been dated differently from c.400 to 100 BCE settling down to first century BCE. The different dates given for Kharavela by different scholars are tabulated as follows:

Sl. No	Author	Date fixed	Source / Reference
1	B.C.Rajendra Lal Mishra	4th cent.BCE	Antiquities of Orisa, Vol.II, p.16ff
2	J.F.Fleet	3rd cent.BCE	JRAS (1910), pp.24 ff, 824 ff
3	F. Luders	3rd cent.BCE	Epigraphia Indica, X, p.161, List.1315
4	B.C. Bhagawan Lak Indraji	2nd cent.BCE	Actes du Sixieme Congress International des Orientalistes, Vol.III, pp.152-177.
5	H.C. Ray Choudhuri	1st cent.BCE	Early History of India, pp.187-194.
6	D. C. Sarcar	1st cent.BCE	Select Inscriptions (1942), p.206,

As there have been many scholars[1], who give these dates, only few references have been given for illustrative purpose. As only historical period is dealt with, there should

[1] Jaina Chhotelal, ***Khanderi-Udhyagiri cave Inscriptions (2nd Century B.C)***, Calcutta, 1948.
Sasikanta, ***The Hathikumpha Inscription of Kharavela and Bhadru Edict of Asoka, A Critical Study***, New Delhi, 1971.
A. Chand, ***Date of Kharavela***, Journal and Proceedings of Royal Asiatic Society (1923), p.395.
....., ***Date of Kharavela***, Orissa Historical Research Journal, Vol.III, No.2, pp.84-99.

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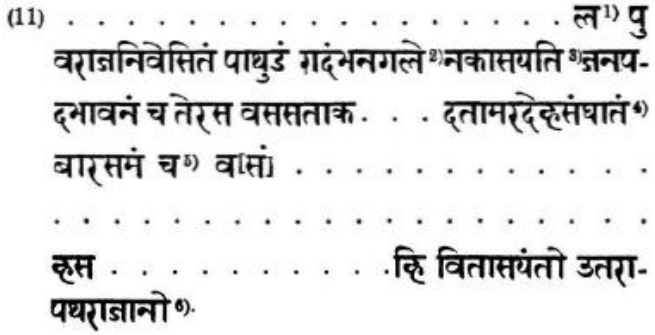
not have been any difficulty in fixing the date, but, problem comes in dating, as nothing could go beyond the Alexander's invasion, as has been decided and fixed by the British historians. It is surprising to note that initially, the British themselves placing him in 3rd cent.BCE and then encouraging the Indians, when they tried to fix in the first cent. BCE. From the Bhagawanlal Indraji's article, the following specimen is produced here for convenience:


(11) . . . . . ल[1] पु
वराजनिवेसितं पाथुडं गदंभनगले[2] नकासयति [3]ञनय-
दभावनं च तेरस वससताक . . . दतामरदेहसंघातं[4]
बारसमं च[5] वासं . . . . . .
. . . . . .
हस . . . . . हि वितासयंतो उतरा-
पथराजानो[6].

Kharavela's defeating the Confederacy of Tramira / Dravidian Kings: Surprisingly, the Kharavela's inscription records that he defeated a confederacy of Dravidian kings, which was threatening his territorial integrity. Interestingly, scholars have been mentioning that it was 103, 113, 130 or 300 yeas old, reading the expression - तेरसा वस सता = terasa vasa sata / triyodasha varsa sata= त्रयोदशा वर्षसत् and so on, but, recently, scholars of Orissa read it as "1300 years" (13 x 100).
The readings of dates, as given by the modern scholars, are as follows:

K. A. Nilakanta Sastri[2]: "The famous Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela (first half of second century B.C) mentions a league of Tamil kings that was ***113 years old at the date of the inscription*** and had been for some time a source of danger to the Kalinga kingdom."

Epigraphia Indica[3]: "l.11…….And the market-town (?) Pithumda founded by the Ava King …he ploughs down with a plough of asses; and (he) thoroughly breaks up the confederacy of the T[r]amira (Dramira) countries of one hundred and thirteen years, which has been a source of danger to (his) country (Janapada)".
The rendering of the inscription by different scholars are as follows:

Nabin Kumar Sahu[4]: He reads the inscription differently as follows:

- **Janapada bhavanam cha vasa sata katam Tamira deha samghatam** (Pali version)
- **Janapadha bhavanam cha trayodhasha varsha sata krutam bhinatti dhramila desha sangatam** (Sanskrit version).

[2] K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, ***A History of South India***, Oxford University Press, Madras, 166, p.88.
[3] ***Epigraphica Indica***, Vol.XX (1929-30),Delhi, Magager of Publications, 1933, pp.86-89.
[4] Nabin Kumar Sahu, ***Kharavella***. Orissa Museum, Bhubaneswar, 1984.

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Its translation: (In the eleventh year……) Also (His Majesty) shattered the territorial confederacy, of the Tamil states having populous villages that was existing since ***thirteen hundred years*** (English rendering).

K. P. Jayswal[5]: he translated in Saskrit as follows:
Jana-pada-bhavanam cha terasa-vasa-sata-ketu-Bhada-tit ….amara-deha-samghatam.
"His Highness Ketu who (flourished) thirteen centuries before……..which has been established by the Former Kings in the city of ***Pith-udak-darbha*** and is pleasing to the country" (p.464).
Though he differs with the King(s), the number of years is read as "***thirteen centuries before***" Kharavela.
R. D. Banerji[6] follows his translation.
R. Mukherji [7] has dealt with the expression "Tramira daha" and its relation with Kharavela.
Thus, the important point to be noted is that the territorial confederacy of the Tamil states…..was existing since thirteen hundred years. If the date of Kharavela is taken according to different authorities, the existence of the territorial confederacy of the Tamil kings goes back to 400 + 1300 = 1700 BCE to 100 + 1300 = 1400 BCE. Therefore, the antiquity of the Tamil kings can be historically goes back to 1700 to 1400 BCE. Hence, the scholars should consider this important aspect and research further about the antiquity of the Sangam period and the kings of the period in question.

The implication of Kharavela inscription on the Tamil Chronology: The above inscription gives the important historical facts:

1. Kharavela was ruling with the territories adjoining to the ancient Tamil kings.
2. The Tamil kings were having a confederacy.
3. The confederacy implies political alignment with the well defined state formation and rule.
4. That confederacy was threatening the territories of Kharavela.
5. It had been existing 1300 years before him.
6. Therefore, the existence of the confederacy of Tamil kingdoms had been since 1700 BCE or 1400 BCE depending upon the fixation of the date of Kharavela.
7. This takes the date of the ancient Tamil kings to 1700-1400 BCE period.
8. The Tamil historiographers, therefore, should study this aspect and refix the date of Sangam literature before that period.

Kharavela's skill and exploits: The details of Kharavela are taken from the Hathigumpha inscription and are as follows:

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[5] K.P. Jayswal,, ***Hathigumpha inscription of the Emperor Kharavela (173 B.C to 160 B.C)***, Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol.III, 1917, pp.425-473.
[6] R. D. Banerji, ***Notes on the Hathigumpha Inscriptions***, Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol.III, 1917, pp.486-509.
[7] R. Mukherji, ***Kharavela and Tramira Daha***, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters, Vol.VII, Nos.3-4, 1965, pp.129-131.

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1. He was the master of all arts – well versed in Gandharva Veda. He receive the Tauyatrika (performance of dance, song and concert = Iyal, Isai and Nadagam?) included in the sixty-four branches (of art) that had been suspended during the time of Mauryas.
2. He caused the gate, rampart and structures of his fort to be repaired and palace built.
3. He defeated the following kings / rulers or people:
    i. Vidyadhara
    ii. Rastrika chief.
    iii. Bhojaka chief.
    iv. Destroyed the fort of Gorthagiri.
    v. Rajagraha.
    vi. Yavanaraja was nade to retreat to Mathura.
    vii. He shattered the territorial confederacy of te Tamil states having populous villages that was existing since thirteen hundred years.
    viii. Terrorised the kings of Uttarapada.
    ix. Generated fear among the people of Maghadha.
4. He cause (the army) to march through Bharatvarsha for conquest.
5. He caused the aqueduct that had been excavated by King Nanda three hundred years before, to flow into (Kaling) nagari through Tanausuli (or Tosali.)
6. Though, he was a Jain, he patronized Vedic religion, performed sacrifices and lived well, enjoying life.
7. He excavated a rainy season retreat at Kumari hill.

Thus, if one goes by the details of the inscription and they are historical facts, then, Kharavela must have been the greatest king who ruled almost the entire India. However, as the inscription has been of the poetic nature, scholars might think that historical facts might have been coloured with the poetic exaggeration. But, such details cannot be rejected straight away as exaggeration of poetry, as they have specific historical data and information linking other historical facts. Though historians reject Tamil kings going up to Himalayas or conquering North Indian kings etc., because of lack of inscriptional evidences, the possibilities cannot be ruled out, as pointed out by M. Raghava Iyengar[8]. Jayamkondar's Kalingattup Parani might be a psychological sequel to counter the defeat of Tamil kings by Kharavela, as it eulogizes the defeat of Kalinga king by Kulottunga Chola I (1070-1120 CE).

Kharavela and Vincent Smith: Vincent Arthur Smith[9] gives the following details in connection with Mahavira connecting Kharavela inscription:

1. The date 527 BCE, is difficult to reconcile with the well attested fact of his (Mahavira's) interview with Ajatasatru and with the Kharavela inscription.
2. The text of Khaavela inscription was settled in 1917 by R.D. Banerji and K. P. Jayswal as far as possible.

[8] M. Raghava Iyengar, ***Tamizh Vendarin Imayap Padaiyeduppu***, in Araycchi Thoguthi, Tanjore University, Tanjore, 1984, pp.177-185.
[9] Vincent A. Smith, ***The Oxford History of India***, Oxford at Clarendon Press, London, 1923, p.51, 58n, 70, 71.

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3. Kharavela's inscription is referred ***to fix the tentative "470? B.C"*** for Nandivardana Mahanandin as in Matsyapurana.
4. The dates of the dynasties ***have been arranged to suit the new readings*** of the Kharavela inscription (ante, p.58n).

But, he mentions nothing about the king Kharavela or his rule in his book. When he says "***The date 527 BCE…***", it is evident that he knew the chronological problem behind it, because it upsets his 327 B.C mark. That is why in the next line, he records that, "***Professor Jacobi advocates 47 B.C as the approximate year of the decease of Mahavira.***" Therefore, it is evident that the regnal dates mentioned in his inscription cannot be related to some assumed / fixed date and arrange chronologically, as the history of Jainism definitely goes back to before the advent of the Greeks.

Coming back to the second remark, "***The text of Kharavela inscription was settled in 1917***", the fact is that it has not been settled, but continues even today subjected to research as pointed out above. When it records about the Tamil kingdoms existing during 1700 or 1300 BCE in the south, it is unhistorical to deny historical kingdoms existing in the north correspondingly.

In the third point, scholars should note that the date "470?" BCE has been fixed provisionally, that too, based on Matsyapurana, which has always been dubbed as myth and bundle of lies or concoctions of crooked Brahmins who always wanted to push back their chronology! The double standards of scholars relying upon Puranas for historical data for construction of historical chronology at one side and denigrating them at another side should be noted. Why the ladder climbers should kick down the ladder after climbing up? What was the motive?

And finally in the last point, he himself confessed that it has been done only, "***to suit the new readings of the Kharavela inscription (ante, p.58n)"*** in 1917, because he arranged, "***the dates of dynasties accordingly***"**!** Then, what was the arrangement? Why the date of death of Mahavira should vary and they should place differently as 527 BCE, 477 BCE and so on? Perhaps, they have been so obsessed with the years ending with the numbers 27, 27, 47, 57, 67, 77, 87……?

Jainism, Kalinga and Tamizhagam: the impact of the Tamils and Tamizhagam in the historical perspective has been very strong and important:

1. All Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions dated to c.250 BCE found in the Tamizhagam relate to Jaina monks donated by merchants, who might be Tamil Jains.
2. Chandragupta Maurya came to Sravanabelagola and "died starving of penance facing north" (Vadakkiruthal), after converting to Jainism.
3. Jains dominated the educational curriculum of the Tamils after Sangam period, as is evident from the "Five Great Epics" and "Padinen Kizh Kanakku" literature.[10]

[10] K.V.Ramakrishna Rao, ***Hindu Dharma in the Five Great Tamil Epics***, Hindhu Dharma Sabha, Chennai – 600 030, January 2000.

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4. Naganandi, Jain monk established a "Tamil Sangam" in 450 CE in Madurai.
5. Kalabhras, who have been accused of meddling with the Tamil system etc., had been reportedly Jains.

Kharavela's defeat of Tamils must have played a crucial role in the Jain penetration into Tamil society. It may be noted that during Jain domination, the Kshatriya-Vaisya nexus had been more dominant in the society[11]. Therefore, the role of the Jains in the Tamil context should be studied thoroughly, as they appeared to have been aggressive, hawkish and contentious in their approach in sociological, philosophical and political aspects.

Conclusion: the existence of Tamil kingdoms around 1700 or 1400 BCE in the South India need not be an anathema to any group of scholars, as archaeological evidences do not explain all historical processes in India. Tamil literature has given many historical riddles, which are not solved by the historians:

1. The date of Buddhha "the year of 1616" as given by Sittalai Sattanar of Manimekhalai[12].
2. Another Kovalan existed 9 generations before Kovalan as recorded by Sittalai Sattanar in Manimekhalai has not been studied[13].
3. The 49 generations existed before Irungovel is not studied in the chronological context[14].
4. The Axe-man of Pallavaram lived and his generation has been forgotten.

In Tamil literature, Tamil kings have always been depicted as riding horses with full-fledged horse equipment – saddle, rein, harness, stirrup, shoe, eye-covers etc., whereas, the Greeks and Romans were riding sitting on the backs of horses without such things, but winning all the way. Roman coins were found in Tamizhagam, but no Tamil coins found reported from Rome. Indus seals were found in Bahrain and other middle-east areas proving the mutuality of trade, commerce and movement of people. Tamil people were singing in Tamil around 500-3000 BCE, but a script for it was developed only after 100 CE. Therefore, the Paleolithic, megalithic and Neolithic cultures and ages should be dated independently, instead of relative dating. Therefore, the Paleolithic, megalithic and Neolithic cultures should be dated before the current era. The dating of the Ancient Tamil literature should be revised accordingly.

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[11] K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, ***The Colas***, University of Madras, Madras, 1984, pp.30-31, 35-36.
T.V. Sadasiva Pandarattar, ***Pirkala Chola Saritram (Tamil)***, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, Part-I, 1954 and Part-II, 1957.

[12] K.V. Ramakrishna Rao, ***The Date of Buddha based on the Tamil Epic Manimekhalai***, Workshop on the date of Buddha, Adi Sankara and Kautilya, Bombay, October 18th to 20th 2002.

[13] K.V. Ramakrishna Rao, ***The Date of Buddha based on the Tamil Literary Tradition***, Tamil Nadu History Congress, Chennai, October 13-14 2001.

[14] K. V. Ramakrishna Rao, ***Chronology of the Ancient Tamils (Pandyas) – A Comparative study based on Contemporary Sources***, International Society for the Investigation of the Ancient Civilizations and BISS, Chennai, August 18-20, 1995, pp.11-13.

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